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ABSTRACT

Nine rural Vermont schools committed to linking to their local communities are participating in an ongoing study of how manifest curricula (what is taught) and latent curricula (how classes are taught and schools are governed) influence development of student dispositions toward democratic participation. This paper presents preliminary findings from the first year. In some schools that gave students opportunities to practice democratic values and that had a vision of how service learning or a curriculum of place relates to the school mission, school-community relations improved and the student body developed a sense of civic responsibility. The major factors impacting a school's adoption of service learning were school board support, collaborative leadership, common philosophies of education among teachers and staff, and adequate resources and professional development opportunities. Service-learning and related experiential education opportunities engaged alienated and marginalized students. Most service-learning projects lacked strong ties to the traditional curriculum and strong reflection components, and few service-learning efforts emphasized complex social problems, human rights issues, environmental awareness, or social justice. Barriers to fuller implementation and sustainability of existing efforts include inadequate preparation time, transportation, and resources; uncertainty over where to place emphasis and how experiential learning meets academic standards; philosophical conflicts over the role of education; perceived limitations of students; high stakes testing; and the entrenched authoritarian and anti-democratic organizational structure and mindset of current schooling. (TD)

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Democracy and Education
Schools and Communities Initiative
Conceptual Framework and Preliminary Findings

May 8, 2000

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Schools should be viewed not only as institutions that impart certain knowledge and skills to students, but also as environments that socialize them. Socializing students to achieve just what "aims" is the subject of current debates among educators, politicians, and business leaders alike. This debate can be understood as a conflict among three points of view: 1.) that education is an extension of market forces that helps to prepare students for employment opportunities; 2.) that schools should not socialize but should be limited to providing basic academic skills and knowledge; and 3.) that education is a democratizing force that helps to prepare students to participate actively in all aspects of democratic life. The John Dewey Project on Progressive Education grounds its work in Dewey's assumption that the aims of education should be oriented towards preparing young people to be full and active participants in all aspects of democratic life. The skills and dispositions needed to actively participate in all aspects of democratic life include: the ability to think critically, a sense of efficacy, a commitment to compassionate action, and a desire to actively participate in political life by engaging in local decision-making processes, lobbying, voting, etc., as well as the basic need to be able to read, write and do arithmetic.

In reviewing the research literature on education for democratic participation and social and civic responsibility, L.H. Ehman (1980, 113) reports,

> The findings from this review suggest that the manifest curriculum (i.e., direct instruction involving courses and texts in civics, government, and other social studies courses) is not as important as the latent curriculum in influencing political attitudes. This latent curriculum includes how classes are taught, not the subject matter itself. This classroom climate is directly manipulable by teachers and represents a potentially important level in the political education of youth. The entire school governance climate, which is another aspect of the latent curriculum, is another consistent correlate of student political attitudes.

In a sense, schools that best teach students the skills to participate actively in democracy are themselves institutions that reflect democratic principles not only in word, but also in deed. The "latent curriculum" that Ehman speaks of is essentially experiential in character, centering on the kinds of relationships the students form with their peers, teachers, school leaders, community members and the school culture as a whole. Sheldon Berman, updating Ehman's review of the literature in his book, Children's Social Consciousness and the Development of Social Responsibility, observes,

> What all these studies reveal is that institutional structures—whether in the workplace, family, classroom, or school—that give young people the opportunity to participate in decision-making about meaningful issues can have an impact on their sense of responsibility, their ability to take a collective perspective, their prosocial behavior, their understanding of democratic values and processes, and their personal and political efficacy. There is much more to be learned about the relationship between decision making and actual social and political participation, but these studies demonstrate that participatory and democratic school culture makes a significant difference in some of the key building blocks of social responsibility. (1997, 135)

Traditionally, the school itself has been an institutional "citizen" within its local community (or communities). Schools serve as public spaces, where community members gather to make decisions (board meetings, parent-teacher organizations, etc.), celebrate (plays, performances, fairs and parties) and learn (continuing education classes, community libraries, film series). The school's teachers and

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administrators themselves represent the school and its functions to the external community, often taking on roles as community leaders and active contributors to community life. Students attend events and participate in activities at the school which lay outside of the context of the normal school day. They may witness their teachers acting as citizens outside of the context of their roles as teachers.

Historically, public schools have been governed democratically via the roles and responsibilities given to elected school boards. While, to varying degrees, authority has been given to appointed and hired professional educators to make decisions concerning the operation of schools. The extent to which teachers, parents, students and individual community members have a voice in decision-making varies as well. No matter how decisions are made, students can learn about democracy through the ways that decisions are made in their schools.

The fact that schools play important roles within the life of local communities, and that they are, to varying degrees, democratic institutions can serve as key elements within students' educational experiences. These external and internal organizational realities help to shape the core values inherent in students' educational experiences-- namely, a school's curriculum. Berman cites studies that have concluded that structured civic education curriculum designed to teach civics to students didactically is not effective in imparting a sense of social responsibility in students. He goes on to conclude that when it comes to civic education, it is less important *what* students are taught than *how* they are taught.

According to many of those who believe that the aims of education should be devoted to the preservation of democratic processes, the prevailing educational culture found in most schools is based on a philosophy of scientific management in which hierarchy, linearity, and efficiency are stressed. Students learn how to follow direction, conform to norms, and compete with each other in order to succeed. This traditional pedagogy relies on didactic, authoritative learning methodologies in which the teacher is viewed as the "expert" with knowledge to impart to the students. It teaches students important fundamental lessons about their proper, passive roles in their education and by inference in society-at-large. These "closed" classroom environments fail to teach students much about democratic processes and how to function within them. Berman found:

> A closed classroom climate is one where teachers use authoritarian classroom strategies, maintain singular control of the classroom and curriculum, and either avoid controversial topics or present limited perspectives on these conflicts. In his [Ehman 1980] extensive review of the political socialization literature, he found that open classroom climates promoted democratic values, enhanced efficacy, and encouraged participation while closed climates promoted authoritarian values and had a negative impact on efficacy and participation. Leming (1992, 148) found the same pattern in his review of the impact of contemporary issues curricula. He notes that 'curricula that involved peer interaction, most often through group discussion and activities where students were actively involved in the collective exploration of attitudes and values in an open and democratic atmosphere, were found to be consistently effective in producing attitudinal change.' (Berman 1997, 148)

John Dewey, Ivan Illich, bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and many others have all critiqued the authoritative, essentially anti-democratic mode of education that has become a pervasive mainstay of the modern educational system. These progressive educators have posited, in turn, alternative ways of understanding and practicing progressive pedagogy. Popular education, collaborative learning, problem-posing education, and many other alternative approaches to education draw upon the assumption that learners learn best when they take on a responsibility for their own learning. One such pedagogical approach that requires such a responsibility and seeks to link participatory forms of learning to life beyond the narrow confines of the classroom is "service-learning."

Across the state of Vermont, and indeed across the country, educational institutions are adopting practices designed to ground their educational mission in the life of their local communities. A study titled, "Service-Learning and Community Service in K-12 Public Schools," conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found that "sixty-four percent of all public schools, including 83 percent of public high schools, had students participating in community service activities recognized by and/or arranged through the school," while, "thirty-two percent of all public schools organized service-learning

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as part of their curriculum, including nearly half of all high school." These "service-learning," "community-based learning," or "curriculum of place" activities are involving students, teachers, parents, and community members in jointly produced projects and programs that engage students in active learning situations that provide a benefit to the local community. When these approaches to learning and education are done well, they can help to prepare students to participate more fully in all facets of democratic life.

A number of terms are used to describe the strategies employed to link schools to local communities. A "curriculum of place" is a term used by the Annenburg Rural Challenge and others to describe a variety of projects, programs, and initiatives that seek to root a school's entire culture in the life of local communities. Curriculum of place encompasses the "latent curriculum" alluded to by Ehman and Berman, while the cultivation of links between community engagement and the formal curriculum taught in the school are not necessarily an objective.

A curriculum of place may involve the opening of school resources to the community, with facility spaces used for community events, social services offered at the school may be extended to local residents. For example, at Currier Memorial Elementary School in Danby, Vermont, educators are extending a warm and regular welcome to the members of greater communities of Danby and Mt. Tabor. The school's principal has been an enthusiastic supporter of the idea that in a rural area such as Danby, it is important for the school to find a myriad of ways to serve as the community's center. She believes that when this happens, both children and adults feel more connected and develop a deeper, richer sense of sharing the same community (e.g., the same sense of "place"). Each month, the students and staff host a luncheon for the community. Students greet the guests, help to serve the meal and sit with the community members at tables during lunch. More than eighty community members and grandparents attended this year's November luncheon feast. An initiative which is receiving rave reviews in the community is the new "Currier Bulletin." This is a monthly newspaper, written by students with the support of the school's principal. It features school and community news and dates. The "Bulletin" is mailed to every household in the two towns. These are towns that do not have a local newspaper, and feedback to the principal from members of the community has been very positive. Currier students get a chance to interact with members of a different generation and come to understand how their school plays a functional role in the life of the community.

A curriculum of place may also encompass direct ties between local communities and the social studies or science curriculum. Student may learn about their local communities through oral history projects, photographic retrospectives, and studies of the natural environment. These project may or may not involve students in proving a direct benefit to their communities. Oral history projects or photographic retrospectives may be shared with local community members, enriching the historical and cultural life of the community.

A particular form of curriculum of place that has received growing attention in recent years is "service-learning." "Service-learning is a set of pedagogical practices that attempts to synthesize and connect community service experiences to specific spheres of knowledge for the dual purposes of mastering that knowledge and developing citizen skills that support one's active participation in democratic processes." The Community Trust Act of 1993 defines service-learning as:

1. a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of the community;
2. coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institutions for higher learning, or community service program and the community;
3. helps foster civic responsibility;
4. integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the education components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and
5. provides structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service-learning.

A service-learning opportunity differs from "community service" in that participants "reflect" on the nature of what they have experienced while being engaged with the community. In most cases, this reflection encompasses a connection that the students are making between what they are

learning in the classroom to aspects of community life. In Vermont, teachers are making explicit links between service-learning and the new Vermont Framework of Standards.

For example, a fourth grade teacher at Barretown Elementary and Middle School in Barretown, Vermont decided she wanted her students involved with senior citizens at Woodridge Nursing Home, but not just entertain them. She wanted them to get to know each other. For this activity, she aligned her project with Standards in language and communication. Each child picked out a favorite easy reader book with large print and pictures so the seniors could look on with them. The students practiced reading with a classmate and then reading to students in a lower grade. They practiced until they read smoothly and with expression. Before their visit, a representative from Woodridge came to talk with the children about interacting with the residents. They talked about some aspects of aging such as forgetfulness and being hard of hearing.

After this preparation, the class went to Woodridge and read to the seniors. Two or three students in each group matched up with an adult: they introduced themselves, read to them, discussed the books with them, and presented gifts they had made for them. Several boys, who were often hyperactive, became model citizens as they read to a senior gentleman and then talked about the dogs they each had owned. When the students returned to class, they shared their thoughts as well as wrote about their experience. The teacher related every part of the activity to the language standards on "listening," "speaking," "reading," and "writing."

At Holland Elementary School in Holland, Vermont, an oral history project organized by a sixth grade teacher, was designed to meet the Vermont Framework's "Vital Results." The project consisted of students recording their interviews with several elders in this rural farming community and using these interviews to write a biographical essay on each elder's life. They focused on such topics as the differences in education and economics of the town from past to present. The project is credited with bringing the students closer to the elders in their community, teaching them about local history, and giving them a sense of pride for rural traditions. This project will serve as the stepping stone for future interactions between community members and students, as there are plans for a community assets survey, a rural traditions project taught by community members in the school, and an opening of the school to all community members during the summer, including a computer class and public access to the internet.

These examples highlight another key element in a service-learning experience: the development of a relationship or partnership between students and community members, schools and communities. There exists a reciprocal relationship in which "service" provides mutual benefits for all participants, with students and community members learning from their common experiences. As in the case of Barretown and Holland Schools, inter-generational connections are made between students and the senior citizens of their community.

In some cases, members of the community can take even more active roles in facilitating the educational experiences of young people. For example, "Getting to Know You: Connecting Students to the Wisdom of the Elders" was a collaborative project between Peacham School in Peacham, Vermont, Food Works, a local non-profit organization, and local residents. The project was designed to encourage interactions between students and the elders in their community, through the idea of "cultural literacy." The project designers define cultural literacy as:

1. passing down stories, skills, and knowledge from generation to generation;
2. developing an awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the heritage of the community;
3. a process for documenting a community's rich cultural traditions;
4. preserving the past;
5. integrating community wisdom into state and national standards and curriculum units.

Project designers, teachers, and community members cultivated cultural literacy among students by encouraging and facilitating elder efforts to share their wisdom, skills, and traditions with children. Activities were organized around themes such as "stories and local history," and "crafts and environment." Science, language arts, social studies, and mathematics curricula came alive to students as

they made connections between their experiences working with the elders and their academic studies. Successfully built birdhouses, orderly and vibrant vegetable gardens, and freshly baked bread provided tangible evidence that indeed students were learning from their elders.

The reciprocity of exchange was emphasized as students were encouraged to give back to their elders through a variety of community service projects. These include holiday caroling trips to elderly "shut-ins," weekly visits in which students read to elders, an "annual grandparents day", and a culminating celebration in which students made presentations of what they'd learned from each elder. These events provided elders with a sense of connection and appreciation from students, and taught them that they had much to learn from their youngest population, as well.

Project participants cited benefits to the cultural exchange as including: an increased understanding and appreciation between generations; a mutual recognition that elders and students alike are sources of inspiration and knowledge; elders gaining a sense of feeling useful, valued, and respected; students learn to interact with older people; students and elders feel connected which builds self-esteem; the creation of positive community relations; and a relevant and meaningful curriculum for students.

Older school-age students may work with younger children from their local communities. For example, Thetford Academy in Thetford, Vermont, has developed a "Primary Partners" English class for 11th and 12th graders who pair up with 1st and 2nd graders in the elementary school. The high school students plan, design, implement, and reflect on activities for their days with the young children such as literacy projects, cooperative games, and other classroom activities. The high school students also engage in child development study, through observation of the young children, examination of their own growth, and a research project of their choosing.

Concrete projects focusing on some community defined need can be created by the students and serve as a vital learning opportunity for them. Oftentimes these projects can provide a lasting impact on the life of the local community. For example, three years ago high school students at Cabot School were brainstorming ideas that might make good service-learning projects which could be underwritten by the Serve America component of Vermont Rural Partnership. One student suggested working with the Cabot Historical Society on the restoration of the West Hill School House. They had purchased the building from the town for a dollar in 1970.

In the 1800's, Cabot was home to about two hundred people. The tiny rural town contained many farms, a church, a mill, and one small one room schoolhouse. This proposed project would not only provide the students with place-based learning, it would also be a great opportunity to partner with a community organization. Three years later, exterior restoration has been completed, and students are working on the interior. Many artifacts have been collected: 50 old textbooks, slates, kettles, ink wells, and a school bell. The final phase of the project will be to create a living history laboratory. Each shared success forges a stronger bond between students and their community. Site leader, David Book, commented that, "As a result of efforts by the Cabot Historical Society and the Heritage class at Cabot School, the school house stands as a lasting monument to a long lost way of life."

In some cases, the adoption of service-learning as a core school principle has lead to a variety of projects that provide benefits to the local community. The 7th and 8th grade students at the Guilford School in Guilford, Vermont, produce the community newspaper. The need for the newspaper surfaced as a result of a "community assets" survey administered by Guilford students in 1994. Residents cited the need for better lines of communication between the school and the community, but also within the community itself. As a result of these findings, the Guilford Gazette was started and produces approximately six issues per school year. Students interview residents, collect adds, report on the pressing news of the day and highlight important issues occurring at the school. They are also responsible for all aspects of the newspaper's production. The students learn about journalism, conducting an oral history, and running a business. In an effort to get all 7th and 8th grade students involved in Guilford-related projects, the school has instituted "Guilford Day," an afternoon each week devoted to projects that link the students to their local community in tangible ways. One group is working with a local environmental group to map the flora and fauna of the local state park. Another group is working on historical preservation projects.

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In some cases, the students at the schools mentioned above have been exposed to many of the complex issues that characterize community life. Students have reported on local politics, sat on the local school board, and had a voice in making some school decisions. When students are afforded the opportunity to have a major voice in their schools and local communities, the exposure to democratic practices is amplified.

Fads in education are common. Time will only tell as to whether service-learning and related community engagement strategies can be sustained and make real impacts on how education is understood and delivered in schools and communities. The conflicting aims of education outlined earlier-- "education is an extension of market forces," "education as basic academic skills attainment;" and "education as a democratizing force"— that are often pitted against one another will impact the future of service-learning education.

When the aims of education are thought of in terms of market forces, service-learning serves as a variation of "school-to-work" or internship experiences that place students in local businesses to acquire "real life" experience in work settings. These opportunities are experiential in character and do give students a voice in determining where they are placed. However, there are fundamental differences between school-to-work/internship experiences and service-learning. The differences lie in the nature of the "reflection" conducted with students and in the kinds of partnerships forged between the schools and the community. In most school-to-work or internship programs students are not asked to look critically at community life. Reflection on school-to-work settings center more on skill acquisition. The placement site is often not viewed critically, with the assumptions inherent to the organization not questioned.

Critical thinking implies the extent to which students can view situations from multiple perspectives, process internal and external conflicts, and engage in what social science researchers call "thick" description. In service-learning experiences students are often encouraged to talk about their emotional responses to community situations.

The kinds of partnerships that are forged between schools and organizations differs as well. School-to work partnerships are often made between local businesses and schools. Community organizations and small informal groups of citizens do not usually serve as sites, although non-profit agencies often do. The aims of the partnership differ, however. In school-to-work programs the aims are focused on exposing students to careers and work skills, with the sponsoring organizations benefiting from free or cheap labor. In a service-learning setting, the aims are less focused on student learning of particular skills and more on exposing students to various social needs or aspects of civic life. The partnership between the school and the community organization is often viewed much more deeply. In some cases, students perform tasks, such as organizing community events or raising funds that would not get done otherwise. Thus, the opportunities for students to take on genuine responsibilities are often greater in service-learning settings.

Advocates of the "education as the extension of market forces" approach to schooling may not have any difficulty in endorsing service-learning projects. They may view the development of critical thinking skills and a sense of civic responsibly as important skills that may even eventually serve students well in the work place. Yet, the extent to which critical thinking is valued in the contemporary American work place can be debated. Certainly, democratic values are virtually non-existent in most work places. If service-learning programs or other efforts to impart democratic values to students were very effective at instilling critical thinking skills, the participants in the service-learning setting—students, teachers, and community members-- may ask more of school leaders, politicians, local business leaders, and their fellow citizens. For example, after a group of high school students in one Vermont school had returned from a visit to a school in Indiana in which students had a strong voice in setting school policy, the Vermont students staged a boycott of their school cafeteria, asking that the food portions be larger. The school's leaders felt the pressure from the empowered students, who had obviously learned some things about using their power democratically.

Proponents of the "education as basic academic skills attainment" are perhaps the biggest critics of service-learning and other curriculum of place activities in schools. It is thought that service-learning

takes students out of school, causing them to pay less attention to academic achievement. The "standards" movement, particularly those emphasizing the needs for high stakes testing to measure student achievement, is often pitted at odds against the academically "soft" practices inherent to service-learning. Teachers are feeling the pressure to put aside creative or experiential activities that may take a great deal of time to organize to focus on ensuring that student perform well on tests. The assumption ingrained in the minds of these teachers and the policy makers pushing for higher test scores is that peripheral activities such as service-learning may be nice, but they should not be offered at the expense of student academic achievement. The challenge for advocates of place-based learning is to demonstrate how these experiences result in student learning. As in the cases of Holland and Barretown, explicit connections between service-learning activities and academic achievement such as Vermont Standards can be made. To prove that these experiences have been important factors in a student's mastery of, for example, a higher reading level will be extremely difficult to prove. Demonstrating that a student has developed a deeper sense of civic responsibility or acquired critical thinking skills may be difficult to prove as well. Indeed, further research is necessary to document the extent to which service-learning leads to improved academic performance and student achievement.

What is clear is that students enjoy service-learning. (Eyler & Giles, 1999) Some use the experience to find a deeper meaning in their education. Others find the experience of learning through experiences to be stimulating and a more suitable learning style for them. There is some evidence to suggest that service-learning can be a useful strategy for reaching out to marginalized or "underachieving" students. These students may find the responsibilities often inherent in service-learning projects bestowed upon them as an opportunity to be taken seriously. In countless interviews with teachers who have practiced service-learning, they are almost uniformly capable of relating stories of troubled students who have taken a serious interest in their education as a result of participating in a service-learning project.

Whether these examples are enough to placate the back-to-basics advocates or not, more evidence on the impacts of place-based curriculum on student learning is needed. The gathering of this evidence should not simply fall to independent researchers, evaluators, or teachers. The movement toward student portfolios speaks to the growing awareness of the need for students to take a more active role in their learning by being responsible for creatively demonstrating what they have learned.

For the advocates of education as a democratizing force, the democratic implications of service-learning and other efforts to infuse democratic principles into the life of the school are often taken for granted. The quality of the reflection and the depth of the partnership are of vital importance. When these factors are not well conceived or enacted the impacts on student learning of democratic principles are weakened. Likewise, the extent to which students have a real voice in defining projects is important.

What would a school that conceives of itself as a democratizing force in its students' education look like? We have attempted to outline some of the kinds of practices that would be enacted, particularly those that make explicit links between forms of community engagement and the manifest curriculum. There are other factors pertaining to the latent curriculum to consider that have a tremendous bearing on student learning. These factors include the extent to which students have a voice in school governance, the extent to which teachers collaborate and support each other, the kind of leadership modeled by school leaders, the level of thoughtfulness that the school board exerts and models for the rest of the community. Other factors include the existence of a common understanding among teachers, school administrators, parents, community members and students that the school is, first and foremost, a crucial part of the local community, and that as such, bears a responsibility for serving not only its students, but the entire community. Such service may come in the form of offering the school as a public place, where the entire community can gather for special events, such as in our example from Currier Memorial. This service may also entail supporting teachers and students in conducting projects that have a lasting and meaningful impact on the community, such as Cabot's renovation project or Guilford's community newspaper. This service may also come in the form of preparing students to be active citizens in their local communities and developing a sense of appreciation for the local culture.

The *Democracy and Education; Schools and Communities Research Project*, sponsored by the John Dewey Project on Progressive Education, is comprised of a series of case studies of schools that have attempted or are in the process of attempting to connect the school's curriculum to the life of the local

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community. Nine schools located across the State of Vermont are participating: three elementary schools; two combined elementary and middle schools; one middle school; two high schools; and one K-12 school. Each of the these schools is in the process of developing curricula, projects, and initiatives that are bringing community members into the school and taking students out into the community. A researcher at each site is spending at least 14 full days on site, conducting interviews with teachers, administrators, parents, students and community members and observing classroom and community-based activities. Over 250 teachers, school administrators, students, community members, parents, and school board members will have been interviewed by the end of the first year of the study.

The schools were selected because of their commitment to linking their schools to their local communities. All schools are members of one or more networks of Vermont schools that have made a commitment to adopt school-wide, school change processes. The two networks that the schools belong to are: the Vermont Rural Partnership, a consortium of 18 rural schools in Vermont that have agreed to develop a "curriculum of place," create a "community of purpose," and foster student leadership; and Foundation for Excellent Schools, a network of 22 Vermont schools which have agreed to work together to share ideas for improving their schools, with a particular emphasis on developing service-learning initiatives.

The researchers at each site are examining various aspects of the "manifest" and "latent" curriculum that have proven to be important in developing students' dispositions toward democratic participation. The study's focus centers on the extent to which these schools model democratic values, and how initiatives designed to bring community members into the school, or get students out into the community impact school/community relations, school culture, and the learning of students and others.

The school/community relations area focuses on such questions as: What has the history been between the school and local community? What community partnerships have been established? How were they established? How are the town's children perceived by residents? How has the adoption of a curriculum of place impacted this relationship? In the schools that have a longer history of experimenting with community-based learning, it is apparent that the relationship between the school and the community has been drastically enriched.

The school culture area looks into issues pertaining to internal governance, leadership, and student voice. In the schools that have been using place-based curriculum strategies, strong leadership that places value on being inclusive and constructing a common vision and mission for the school are evident. Relevant questions include: Who have been the leaders in advancing change within the school? How have new leaders emerged? Why haven't new leaders emerged? What do school personnel believe to be the purpose of enacting a curriculum of place? What do they perceive as the aims of such an education? What have been some of the barriers leaders face in enacting changes? What have they done to overcome these barriers? What are the challenges faced by schools, other organizations and individuals? What roles have students taken in enacting change? How have traditional teacher/student/administrator roles changed over time?

A third major focus concerns the impacts of service-learning and related activities on learning. Questions that are being asked include:To what extent has a "place-centered" curriculum helped students to master traditional academic material? Has the curriculum of place helped students meet the Vermont Framework of Standards, particularly the "Vital Results"? How have students, teachers, and community members reacted to a place-centered curriculum? What pedagogical techniques have worked best to stimulate learning? To what extent are students understanding the socio-economic realities that help frame their lives and community? How has student self-assessment worked?

The focus of the first year of the study is understood to be primarily descriptive in nature. Additional years of data collection will be focused on student learning, the effectiveness of technical support efforts, and other themes arising from the process.

Several preliminary findings have emerged:

- There are many projects and initiatives occurring in the nine schools that link students to their local communities, such as the examples mentioned above.
- In some schools, students are being exposed to democratic values and are given opportunities to practice them. For instance, students are given the authority to decide the service-learning project themes or designs.
- In some schools, a comprehensive vision of how service-learning/ curriculum of place relates to the mission of the school exists and is accepted by most school officials, students, and community members.
- In some schools, the adoption of a common vision and practices has resulted in improved school-community relations and a student body that possesses a sense of civic responsibility
- Some of the major factors impacting a school's adoption of service-learning and other forms of democratic learning include:
    - School board buy-in and active support;
    - Effective, collaborative leadership in which school leadership presents a strong vision of community engagement and enlists teachers, students, and community members in collaboratively attaining these goals;
    - Common philosophies of teaching and learning among teachers and staff;
    - Adequate resources and professional development opportunities for teachers and other school staff.
- There is evidence to suggest that service-learning and related experiential education opportunities can help to enliven the learning process for alienated and marginalized students.
- Most service-learning projects lack strong ties to the traditional curriculum and strong reflection components for students and teachers.
- Very few of the service-learning efforts emphasize the study of complex social problems, issues related to human rights, environmental awareness, or social justice.
- Significant barriers still exist to fuller implementation and sustainability of existing efforts:
    - Structural issues include: teacher time/preparation; transportation/logistics; and an overall lack of resources.
    - Philosophical issues include: where to place emphasis; how experiential learning meets academic standards; conflicts over the aims of education; and perceived limitations of students.

The *Democracy and Education, Schools and Communities Initiative* is grounded in a model of "praxis" that seeks to use solid, academically rigorous research to inform progressive educational practices, while supporting action research projects that promote reflective practice and collective problem-solving. In essence, research is informing practice.

As we approach the end of the first year of research , it has become apparent that a number of barriers and obstacles are facing the many well-intentioned, highly dedicated teachers, administrators, students

and community members committed to service-learning and other democratic forms of education. High stakes testing, school schedules, a lack of resources, unsupportive school boards, philosophical differences, organizational dynamics, ineffective leadership, and many other factors exist in schools that make sustaining democratic practices an incredibly difficult endeavor.

Schools are often offered "technical support" from outside consultants. The effectiveness of these consultants varies. In some cases, experts are brought in to give a workshop on improving or building content in a certain area, when what is needed is more "process-oriented" work geared toward overcoming organizational, interpersonal, or philosophical barriers. The conception of schools as democratic institutions leads to an entirely new set of assumptions regarding governance and the role of students in their own learning. The scientific management model of schooling that was designed to suit the industrial era is entrenched not only as formal organizational structures, but also as mindsets. To teach democracy by being democratic requires a deep commitment at all levels to examine and reform the relationships between schools and their local communities.

The progressive movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave rise to the creation of bureaucracies as the most efficient means of organizing society. Thus, our school systems were modeled after manufacturing plants. The transition from one room school houses to regional educational centers was a difficult one. As we embark on the next millennium, we find ourselves amidst another historical transition period—from industrialism to the information age. The ability of people to access information and view this information critically is growing ever more important. As "virtual reality" increasingly imposes on the physical realities that characterize our lives in communities, it is ever more important that our schools become places where students, and indeed the entire community, connect with one another in meaningful ways. If our young people do not learn how to relate to others in different generations or of different classes or ethnicities during their years of formal schooling, then when will they? The stakes are indeed high. Cultivating the democratizing forces of formal education is one way of preserving our communal way of life.

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